

## “ Thanks to our community development project, we can now provide service to our own children. ”

I'm quite proud of what we have in my town. We live in a remote community of 1,700 people called Lil'wat Nation, about 40 minutes north of Whistler, B.C.

Our community development project took 10 years. We started planning in 1995 for a daycare. Today, we have 50 spaces in the daycare and a support staff of 18 people.

An occupational therapist was instrumental in putting our plans into action. She helped us develop a proposal for our Aboriginal Supportive Child Development program. After we received funding for three years, she mentored us for a year to develop the program.

The occupational therapist also participates in our Early Intervention team, which meets monthly, along with a physiotherapist, speech and language therapist, community health nurse, community wellness worker, elementary school coordinator, Supportive Child Development Program consultant, and me, the daycare director. We discuss case loads and services that we're providing to the children. The occupational therapist is also involved in training the early childhood educators.

The daycare has brought many benefits to our community. It allows families to return to high school, get a post secondary education, search for jobs or go back to work. At the daycare, we also help strengthen families referred to us through the Ministry of Children and Family development. One of the criteria for these children, who have experienced neglect or abuse, is to attend daycare daily. And if these families need extra support with occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language, or supportive child development, we help with that.

Our daycare is in the same building as a health centre where we offer services for 20 children with special needs through our Supportive Child Development Program. Our occupational therapist provides assistance to support workers, sets goals for the children and works with their parents.

We're a locally run community with no outside agencies. It is all Native people who are trained and qualified to work in the daycare and health centre.

We're still developing as a community. We're planning to expand our daycare by 14 spaces and add an office for our Supportive Child Development program.

We're also organizing a day-long community event to celebrate the children in our community. We've invited the whole community and are providing dinner. We asked the occupational therapist to meet with families and teach them about developing fine motor skills during this event.

We started planning the daycare in 1995. Since the plan included trained early childhood educators and the construction of the daycare centre, it was finally complete in 2003. I'm quite proud of what we have up here. It is part of the whole community's dreams.



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